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JUN 27 1975

CIA's director silent amid public furor

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NEWPORT — William E. Colby, the director of the embattled Central Intelligence Agency, gave a speech here yesterday that never once mentioned assassination plots, domestic spying, wiretapping or the agency's reported connection with Mafia figures.

Colby's visit proved to be the eye in the hurricane of

legislative and press criticism that is now engulfing the CIA. Instead of angry congressmen and hostile swarms of newsmen, he found a largely sympathetic audience at the Naval War College composed primarily of military students and about 200 guests.

The CIA's troubles were mentioned only obliquely. Colby acknowledged that the

CIA has made some "mistakes," that it has "overstepped its bounds" and "did some things that were plain wrong."

He did not dwell on these but ascribed the errors to an "old" post-World War II CIA that perhaps was overly concerned with clandestine operations and classic "spy" techniques.

He emphasized that there is now a "new reality" for the CIA, as an information collecting service, relying heavily on sophisticated electronic devices and other such passive intelligence tools. "Intelligence work is now an intellectual process," he declared.

Indeed, Colby looks more like an Ivy League don than a spymaster. He is short — probably 5 feet 7 — and thinly built. He combs his gray hair straight back and wears flesh-colored glass.

The director said his agency can have a positive peacetime role by collecting information that will prevent armed conflict resulting from misunderstanding.

The press was allowed to attend but not to ask questions during the brief question-and-answer period that followed his 30-minute address.

The questions from the floor generally were polite and non-controversial. One guest grumbled later that "I should have asked him what the CIA was doing hiring the Mafia. It seems to me they (the CIA) have got to draw the line somewhere."

Colby's address marked the midway point in this year's annual Current Strategy Forum. Portions of the forum are closed to the working press. One guest who has been privy to both the open and closed proceedings described them as "very light."

If Colby's address was the high point of the 2½-day session, the afternoon session yesterday was something of a low. Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, former chairman of the joint Chiefs of Staff, canceled out at the last minute and his address was read for him by Vice Adm. Harry Train, a former aide. Several persons slept through the address. One man blushed with embarrassment when his own snoring startled him awake.